

Introduction

This issue of the *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* could be considered a highly personal one. Our first two features recount, respectively, one former president's experience as the first lay president at a Catholic institution of higher education and one department chair's application of a particular religious community precept to his professional behavior and practices. Both offer widely applicable and accessible examples of a Catholic way of being within the world of higher education—from a very personal perspective. This issue also includes a special focus on the Mercy charism; it too sprung from one woman's intimate commitment and vision, that of charism founder Catherine McAuley.

Our opening article by Jacqueline Powers Doud, president emerita of Mount St. Mary's College and the first lay president of that college, offers her reflections on the transition from religious to lay leadership. Doud, who was the 2014 recipient of the Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh, CSC, Award at the most recent ACCU Annual Meeting, also led a session at that meeting reflecting on the roles of presidents and spouses. In her article, Doud speaks about the mission and ministry of lay presidents, with an emphasis on the baptismal vocation and dignity of lay Catholics sharing in the threefold office of priest, prophet, and king. She proposes a map or model for lay presidents, pointing out how lay leaders can traverse the terrain, become steeped in the religious tradition and charism of the founders, overcome obstacles and reassure constituents that the institution's religious and Catholic heritage will continue and thrive into the future.

Rodger Narloch, who chairs the department of psychology at his institution, addresses a common dilemma for administrators and department chairs at Catholic colleges and universities, namely, balancing respect for the pluralistic religious views of faculty with remaining faithful to the mission and identity of the college or university. Using the Rule of Saint Benedict as a guide, the author shows how the values and ideals of the Rule serve as guides to help cultivate an incarnational spirituality and specific practices that sustain a sacramental culture, and ultimately transform both faculty and students.

Special Focus: Mercy Education

Mother Frances Xavier Warde, RSM arrived in the United States from Ireland with six other sisters in 1843. Though Pittsburgh was their destination, within four decades the Sisters of Mercy had established themselves in twenty cities throughout the country, staffing more than eighty institutions, including Catholic colleges. From their earliest days in this country, the Sisters of Mercy have acknowledged “that higher education is integral to the mission of the Church and is an effective expression of [their] Mercy mission.”¹ Today, seventeen colleges and universities in eleven states are affiliated with the Conference for Mercy Higher Education. In 2012, these institutions served nearly thirty-one thousand undergraduates and an additional eighteen hundred graduate students.² Mercy education, as a ministry of the Church, goes beyond intellectual and career development, expressing the Mercy “commitment to the pursuit of truth and knowledge and to the furtherance of the social, political, economic, and spiritual well-being of the human community.”³ Mercy colleges and universities sustain Catherine McAuley’s commitment to the poor, especially women, and are faithful to that tradition which lifts up those bowed down and raises the lowly.

The articles in this focus section illustrate the ways that the Mercy charism continues to infuse every facet of institutional life at these particular colleges and universities. These five articles, chosen from the many manuscripts submitted, demonstrate creative ways that the ministry of Mercy comes alive for students and faculty at these institutions.

Mercy education takes a special interest in women who often are at the margins and find access to education difficult. This means that a certain portion of any incoming class will lack certain skills to fully succeed in higher education. To address this challenge, and respond to less than desired retention rates, Carlow University assessed its First-Year Seminar program, and dramatically revised the way the university introduces at-risk students to the rigors of higher education. These same students also had expressed a lack of connection to other students and to faculty. The institution listened to these and other concerns, explored

¹ Conference for Mercy Higher Education, “Statement on Catholic Identity and Mercy Charism for CMHE Colleges and Universities,” 1993, <http://www.mercyhighered.org/identity.html>.

² Conference for Mercy Higher Education, “Member Institutions: Information (2012 Data),” http://www.mercyhighered.org/documents/IPEDS_Info_2012-13.pdf.

³ “Statement on Catholic Identity and Mercy Charism.”

current best practices, and responded by creating learning communities, providing more flexibility with course offerings and instituting mini-courses during the first semester. The result was not only greater satisfaction among these at-risk students, but also a significant boost in retention rates.

As more voices are raised in the public square about the value of higher education and the desire for greater transparency and accountability, colleges and universities have focused on student learning outcomes as a way both to validate their claims and to revise, rework, and improve the way learning takes place within (and outside) their walls. Assessment of core requirements and liberal studies programs at Catholic institutions must include some demonstration that these curricula achieve certain mission-related outcomes. The next article conveys how the University of St. Joseph developed procedures to conduct a systematic assessment of mission-related student-learning outcomes, asking how well the institution's general education curriculum was fulfilling its Mercy mission. The results found certain strengths in student learning, and certain gaps that needed change and improvement. After a series of faculty development workshops and curricular revisions, the university is confident that its curriculum more effectively inculcates the ideals and values of the Mercy mission.

Catholic colleges and universities founded by religious communities live under two identities—one that is Catholic and one that reflects the mission and charism of the founders. While these are not opposed to one another, nonetheless tensions do arise as institutions struggle to better understand, communicate, and embody these two identities. For example, students, staff, and faculty may identify more with the religious community's mission and charism as if these somehow were separate and distinct from the Catholic mission. Mary Hembrow Snyder, Alice Edwards, and Richard W. McCarthy of Mercyhurst University explore these tensions from three different perspectives arising from their diverse roles and responsibilities at the university. Through personal reflections and dialogue, they give voice to the seeming impasse at many levels, articulate the thorny issues, and witness to the possibility of working through these junctures with grace and mercy.

Institutional change is fraught with difficulty and if not implemented with transparency, open communication, and participation, faculty and staff may suffer feelings of alienation, distrust, and a sense of powerlessness for years into the future. Sandra Affenito and her colleagues explain how the University of Saint Joseph looked to its Mercy charism and the principles of Catholic Social Teaching to help guide a

process for exploring the effects of the institution's change from a division to a school structure. After the university implemented the shift, a number of faculty members expressed concern regarding the new model, resulting in a vote by the faculty to study whether the new model should be changed or even abolished. A School Evaluation Committee was appointed whose overall purpose was to assess whether the process and resulting change in institutional structure had been faithful to the mission and identity of the institution. The committee formulated research aims, questions, and methods based on the Mercy charism and Catholic social principles. After a two-year study, the committee found that there was general satisfaction with the new model; that the new structure had brought about increased trust, communication, and collaboration; and that the process of change had been faithful to the Mercy mission and had implemented principles of Catholic Social Teaching.

Our final article discusses business education within the tradition of the Sisters of Mercy. Joseph Eisenhauer studies the relationship between business education and Mercy mission from a dual perspective: (1) the importance of business acumen in the history of various Mercy ministries; and (2) the ways that business programs at Mercy institutions foster and inculcate both the Catholic and Mercy traditions. The author surveyed business programs at Mercy colleges and universities in order to identify the extent to which those programs promote Catholic principles and the Mercy charism. He concludes that there is a synergy between charism and commerce at these institutions, and that the Mercy charism in particular “informs and enlivens the practice of business and business education.”